



Board of Selectmen

February 25, 2014

TO: Acton Zoning Board of Appeals

FROM: Acton Board of Selectmen JKA

RE: Local Initiative Program Application for Comprehensive Permit
Post Office Crossing, 6 Post Office Square, Acton, MA

The Acton Board of Selectmen voted at its February 24, 2014 meeting to submit this memorandum in support of approval by the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) of the Local Initiative Program (LIP) comprehensive-permit application for the proposed Post Office Crossing development at 6 Post Office Square in Acton.

LIP contemplates that a municipality and Chapter 40B developer will work together to create an affordable housing project that is well-suited to local needs, and the Town and applicants have collaborated continually in refining the Post Office Crossing project. The Selectmen initially endorsed the project in October 2012, in a letter to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), supporting the applicants' request for a Determination of Site Eligibility. The DHCD issued its Determination of Site Eligibility in August 2013.

The proposal before the ZBA is consistent with the aim of not only the Town's Comprehensive Permit Policy but the goals of the Town's new Comprehensive Community Plan to encourage smaller-scale developments in or near village centers that diversify the Town's housing stock, respect the Town's architectural traditions and environmental values, and are in close proximity to shops and other services. The applicants are proposing a LEED-certified project consisting of 12 detached houses on a vacant 3.6-acre wooded parcel that is in the Light Industrial district but is surrounded by residential areas. The Town center and retail businesses on Great Road are walking-distance via sidewalk from the site. Three of the houses will be deed-restricted affordable units.

The project reflects the guidance of Town departments and boards, whose input the applicants have sought and incorporated from the outset. The Design Review Board (DRB), which is advisory to the Selectmen, worked very productively with the applicants to refine their earlier plans; the DRB has provided updated comments, dated February 20, 2014, that we are including with this memorandum and hope that the ZBA will give serious consideration in its deliberations.

Post Office Crossing, 6 Post Office Square
February 25, 2014
Page 2 of 2

The Selectmen have some additional suggestions for the ZBA to consider:

- Require disclosure to buyers about the Light Industrial zoning and the non-residential uses permissible in that zone
- Require maximization to the extent feasible of the "green" area on top of the proposed leaching field, for example, with a play area, seating area and/or landscaping to enhance the visual appeal of the development
- Require fencing, signs or other measures to protect the privacy of the abutting wooded property to the rear of the development, and minimize trespassing by residents
- Require a buffer, preferably natural, along the boundary between the development and existing industrial uses
- Request a contribution to the Town's Sidewalk Fund to assist the Town with future improvements of sidewalks serving the development's residents

The Board of Selectmen respectfully requests that the ZBA approve the comprehensive permit application. Thank you.

Enclosure

cc (w/enclosure): Acton Community Housing Corporation



DRB Memorandum

Project Location: Post Office Square, Acton, MA

Could not find these plans on DocuShare:

Architectural Plans: Artform Home Plans -

Engineering Proposal: Eastern Landscape Survey Assoc., Inc.

Landscape Plans: RC Design, L-1 Tree Plan, L-2 Typical Unit Plantings (Over Site Plan base)

Developer: Philip Singleton, Charing Cross Realty Trust (*Not in Attendance*)

Third Review of Project

Date of DRB Review: 02.20.2014

The DRB met to review the newly submitted plans for the Post Office Square Housing project. The Board of Selectmen requested the DRB review the submitted plans and comment in regards to any revisions made from the second submittal and to comment on the planting plans.

As no hard copies of the second submittal were available at the planning department, and we were not able to find second submittal documents on docuShare, our comments are made from recall of the second submittal drawings, and from the newly submitted Planting Plan that is drawn over a Site Plan base.

The DRB is pleased that the newly submitted drawings incorporated several of the DRB's recommendations from the second review. Shown below in more detail are the recommendations that were incorporated into the new plans:

Comments from the Second Review in *italics*, comments from this meeting in black

- *DRB suggested switching units 9 and 10 so that a bank of higher buildings can be created, consolidating the amount of walls needed.* N/A.
- *In situations where retaining wall are over 3' in height, the engineer suggested the wall be terraced, using two wall of lower heights. Railings would not be needed along the tops of wall and the overall visual impact of the wall would be softer.* Walls are now terraced at units 1 & 2. Most of the other walls along the street seem to be at around a maximum 3' height except at units 10, 11, & 12 where the wall height is 6' (see enclosed diagram).
- *Along the north side of the site, the retaining wall at the property line is in some locations, 8 feet in height. The architect suggested one solution to reduce the height of the walls would be to use a unit with a front facing garage thereby allowing the back of the homes to be built into the existing slope and significantly reducing the amount of excavation and retaining wall required. The garage faces would be attractive - partially concealed with a balcony above and detailing. The developer did not originally consider front facing garages because he assumed front facing garages were frowned upon in Acton. The sentiment of the Board was that while the previous state is true, making the home fit best with the topography of the site is a higher priority. Danielle Singleton will forward images of these building styles to the DRB. Walls have been terraced at this area, the lower wall is at a 3' height, the upper wall (close to the property line) ranges from 3' to 8' height.*
- *If a side garage rather than front garage is used on Lot 2, moving the driveway to the other side of the house would require less site work.* N/A. Still significant site work will be required at the garage area.

- *The DRB recommends all porches have a seven foot depth to make them usable. The architect stated that the building finishes, porch styles, shingle and siding colors will vary, and the DRB supports the diversity this will provide for the development as a whole. Porches seem to be around 5' deep.*
- *The architect stated the siding of the homes would most likely be vinyl sided. In order to upgrade the look, the trim around the windows will be wide, giving the siding a more wood-like appearance. N/A*
- *Impervious Surfaces: We discussed reducing the amount of paving in the cul-de-sac by either making a planting circle in the center of the round, or replacing the asphalt at the center of the round with a decorative pavement such as cobblestones. Completed*
- *The DRB suggested removing the end portion of the sidewalk next to the septic wall since the walk wasn't servicing any home. Removal would allow for a planting bed in front of the wall, which could help to lessen the wall's impact at the cul-de-sac. Completed*
- *We discussed whether the septic field would need a fence along the top of the retaining wall, since the wall reaches a height of almost 8' on the south end. If the septic field will be open for people to use (which the DRB recommends), then the board recommends a fence be added. No fence is shown on the Planting Plan.*

Additional Comments on Planting Plans submitted:

- **Tree Plan - Individual trees are not specified making it difficult to comment on the Tree planting scheme. In general, it is common to have single stem trees, 3" caliper along the street (such as the Maple or Elm specified) and multi-stem or smaller trees within the lots, (such as Birch, Redbuds and Shadblow specified).**
- **Typical Unit Plantings - These plans and planting schemes look good.**

In general the DRB supports this project, and believe it has an appropriate scale and density for the site and location. The DRB would encourage additional reductions in wall heights where ever possible, and recommend attractive fencing along tops of walls with more than a 2'-6" drop in locations where pedestrians will be walking or playing at the top of the wall.

Respectfully Submitted, Design Review Board

Members in attendance: Conor Nagle, PE; David Honn, RA; Holly Ben-Joseph, PLA,; DRB

POST OFFICE SQUARE

FENCE
HEIGHTS.
DRB
2.2.14